

Thematic Week 22 - 24 January 2014  
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paper

## *Community Involvement in valuing and managing monuments and sites*

### **The nameless local.**

#### **The heritage practitioner as mediator between built heritage and the local community – searching for working-tools.**

To illustrate the following statements material at hand is used. The modest protected buildings that figure here are not the great propelling monuments of national or international interest.

These cases and their possible outcomes, like the ruins themselves, are probably full of holes. The villages they stand in are diverse but are situated in a for the writers familiar environment in Vlaams-Brabant, Belgium. But whatever their limitations, with these little buildings we would like to trace an arc from history to current conditions and to possibilities for practice to unveil the more intangible values attributed by locals and newcomers and take these in account in the restoration projects of local built heritage.

### **Introduction**

The time a construction will last depends on the value that generations after generations will want to attribute to it. This is determined by the personal and shared memory which is not necessarily based on architectural, historical or archaeological aspects alone (further on we will call these the AHA values) but as well on individual or common experiences, say more intangible values. It is here that heritage is of an incredible importance, since it generates the cultural and social identity of a local group, composed of natives and newcomers. What can the role of heritage be in a changing society where the appropriation of the existing fabric is much more complex than solely national or regional identity?

### **A monument is multivalent.**

Although the vision on restoration changed together with the social and political conditions it is up to today still very much object focused. There is a growing interest for intangible heritage all over the world but the approach in built heritage practice and legislation is still mainly oriented towards conservation and restoration of the tangible fabric of the site preferable of the monumental heritage.

One is hardly focusing, within the historical study of monuments and sites on the actual meaning given by the nameless natives or newcomers, individuals or groups that in most cases appropriated the fabric and its significance or gave it a different meaning 'in the meantime', in the time between the original occupation and the restoration project.

We have nevertheless to be aware of the fact that monuments in the original sense, namely a building, structure or sculpture deliberately erected to commemorate a notable person or event "Monument: Oxford Dictionaries", represent only a small part of all protected built heritage. Most other buildings became monuments unintentionally because at one moment they were considered to be of historical importance or interest or an enduring and unique example of something. This does not necessarily mean that the creators did want to leave evidence of their artistic and cultural life to future generations. Rather than the works themselves by virtue of their original purpose, the beholders, assigned meaning and significance to the existing structure. "Riegl A., (1928:144)"

A historical building is multivalent, it will be read in a chosen way, as the result of a particular perception in different ages, governed by prejudices of the time, and consequently liable to restoration and reuse or not according to those prejudices. What would be demolished at one time, could be of great value in other times. The added values are contemporary. It is the meaning that is transitory.

The possibility to restore and redefine a building of the past depends more than ever on the cultural and social aspects of that building, on its cultural footprint and its possibility to adapt a cultural and social sustainability within the realm of the future. As a consequence it becomes much more interesting to transcend the approach of concentrating on the fabric alone and to develop strategies beyond the narrow solely focus on the object, to relate it towards a bigger framework of cultural and spatial experiences, urban and landscape structures.

How can we detect these intangible and informal aspects of immovable heritage and its relation to the social construct?

What are our obligations – as architects - heritage practitioners, but also as citizens – to consider these special values and respond in form?

### Community Involvement

Within the academic world and the government policies one detects a shift in architectural paradigms from conventional to community-based architecture from top-down to bottom-up decision-making to a more participatory way of working and the redefined roles of architects responding to this shift. This can be seen in a renewed vision on sustainability.

In heritage matters there is definitely an increasing attention for the involvement of local communities in the management plans of heritage sites, but it mainly remains a top-down work of specialists. Some charters and conventions precise, that an adequate social function is required for the restored building and this since the Charter of Venice in 1964. The UNESCO Recommendation on the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas already defines in 1976 that *'this programming should be undertaken with the closest possible participation of the communities and groups of people concerned'* (art.21). The involvement of the community can be explicit and engaged. But limiting the participation to the programming means that in a lot of cases public accountability of the project, especially the cost of it becomes the essence of the project. Although there are interesting examples the level of application and implementation of community participation can then be questioned.

Furthermore the main problem is not only the question of the functionality of the building with its AHA values but the aim to generate meaning in a cultural durable land- and cityscape.

The architects, heritage practitioners, work with that of others who have preceded them, and also in precedence of those who will come after them. One might suppose that as a consequence the work of restoration and adaptive reuse is closely linked to the human experience. But if we consider the broad range of theories on restoration we notice that the architectural and artistic, historical and archaeological values of the monument are in the heart of the discussion.

For everyone involved, it seems evident that the building on its site is the essence of the assignment.

Remarkable enough the 'perimeter' of the site, with the nameless locals and the intangible and social significances very often seems to lie at the very centre of the challenge of the project posted. Yet this rarely comes up as a topic of discussion, its existence either taken for granted or neglected awkwardly. This does not mean that people are entirely excluded but the attention is not focused on them. They are put outside the framework. Their presence is only indirect noticeable by the traces they left.

Forgetting about them is not difficult as they are often invisible or disappearing amid all the other elements, especially if one focuses only on the materiality of the building as a (historic) data. This is enforced by the fact that there are no approved ways for tracing this. Inside the range of methods for managing and valuing monuments and sites, there is a well-known framework to cope with the material aspects of conservation and restoration, but a framework for the intangible layers is lacking.

Community involvement could start from a more subtle engagement of different actors and this from the very beginning of the process of the restoration project.

### The heritage practitioner as mediator between built heritage and the local community.

It is difficult and complex but as a consequence more interesting to define what the local communities are in a world that is struggling with societal transition processes, between the global and the local, immigration and inter-culturality. "Grafe, C. et al., (2011)"

Any place or fabric in the landscape may hold significance for many different people, including natives and newcomers, for many different reasons. We can look at existing monuments and sites as to palimpsests. These can be seen as a form of destruction of the existing but could also be seen as new added valuable layers on top of or through yet existing ones. An interesting parallel can be traced between the story and the cultural landscape. As in a story, the cultural landscape or building consists out of different strata: every period, every act in history has left its traces and relicts and consists of thin, transparent layers placed one on top of the other. The slow piling is revealed through the layers of a variety of 'retellings'. We could add to the literal layers of archaeological remains, a description of the way people experience time, that is, the different social and cultural values people contribute to an existing building or site as we understand just how great the implications of these values are and just how minimal the extent in the restoration projects often is.

Just like the storyteller, the way Walter Benjamin states it in *Der Erzähler. Betrachtungen zum Werk Nikolai Lesskows*, “Hale, D., (2006:1-18)” the architect can be the mediator between the nameless native inhabitant ‘der Seemann’ and the newcomer ‘der Ackermann’ in dealing with an existing structure in a given environment.

To develop the attitude of ‘the Storyteller’, more hidden human behaviour is given greater emphasis. In taking into account certain concepts it might be possible to detect at first sight invisible values for different social groups and individuals, locals and newcomers. “Gantois, G. (2014)”



Figure 1  
Parsonage of Meuzeggem Room 0.3, children playing in the former house of the priest. (Source: local inhabitant, 2001)



Figure 2  
Parsonage of Meuzeggem Room 0.3. Mural paintings were discovered behind the wallpaper. (Source: Gisèle Gantois, 2007)

### Endless conversation

We have to be aware of the fact that there is usually over time an interaction between the built form in the environment and its occupants that is like chemistry. The people are engaged in a dialogue with the landscapes and structures in which they live. Next to the historical and material layering there are these timeless immaterial attachments expressed in the endless conversations between the landscape or building and the individual or community.

One side of this interaction involves the natives giving meaning to places through the events in their lives, which have taken place in the specific landscape or building. Generations pass knowledge of these events down to each other by marks and traces.

But even if the events have left no mark, people remember what has happened. They seem to ‘see’ them as if they had mapped them, as they became part of the collective memory. It is as if they carry around in their heads a plan of the landscape, which has all these places and their meanings, detailed on it.

The other side of the conversation is the triggering of memories and feelings by the simple sight of a place: this is the landscape or fabric ‘talking’ to us. The individual attributes significance to the environment that does things with him rather than the environment itself. The way he sees things is affected by what he already knows, believes or remembers from other places. Here enters the value of the existing buildings and landscapes for the newcomer in our intercultural society.

The never-ending interactions between the landscape or building and the individual or community are very complex. Studying The AHA values now often being the primary determinants of significance in heritage matters can support and help to better understand the attachment of individuals and communities to heritage places and items. “Ardler, J. et al. (2001)



*Figure 3+3bis: In the case of the shutter of the medieval donjon of Peizegem, the former owner left a trace by carving his name into it when he was a child. So next to the important Archaeological value – this is one of the first cross-windows in Flanders, we get a trace of a different significance given by the former occupant. We can imagine the child sitting in the ruined window – looking over the landscape, feeling himself a knight. Thanks to the well-conceived orientation and the corresponding light (North East) he can see without being seen.*

*This information traces an arc in history from the original concept to the actual situation. (Source: Medieval donjon, Hof Ten Houte, Merchtem, North East elevation, level 2, Gisèle Gantois, 2004)*



*Figure 4: Anonymous village in India. One could easily associate these objects with TV antennas. In reality these are signs to indicate that there are sons available for marriage. The native knows the meaning; the newcomer is triggered by the sight of it to give a different meaning. (Source: Marc Dujardin, research field at course of Architectural Anthropology, KU Leuven-LUCA.)*



### Appropriation – ‘patrimonialisation’

Built heritage of local importance, even materially rather poor buildings sometimes appear to be socially more important than high standard monuments that are sometimes socially oppressive.

They attribute the human scale to the landscape and are placed on walking distance or ‘in between’ two goals. Initially privately owned, they became collective by their use, local significance or representation and turned into beacons, points of reference or meeting points. These are spaces people use for satisfying their social needs, places of collective independence.

The territory of these small buildings is often not clearly defined by a real or imagined boundary. And even if sometimes physical walls or hedges surround them they have no mental barriers around. It seems like no one owns them but ideally all have use of them. Very often these historical buildings are appropriated ‘in the meantime’, the time between the original occupation and the new project of adaptive reuse.

An interesting concept is the idea of ‘patrimonialisation’ ”Walsh, K. (1992)” saying that the interest of a community or an individual for an existing structure or landscape becomes explicit the moment the building or landscape is in danger. Finding ways to discover, to observe and to map this can give new insights on the significance of the protected building today and certainly inspire the owner to think about an adequate reuse.



Figure 5: front facade of the parsonage of Menzégem. (Source: Gisèle Gantois, 2007)

*The parsonage of Menzégem is in itself a building with considerable historical value, built by the religious order, the Norbertines from the 16th century on. Transformed with every new occupant. The building lost its initial function as house for the priest at about 1970 and got abandoned. So thought the municipality.*

*The archives burned with the abbey during the French Revolution. The source of all sources was the building itself in its context today.*



Figure 6: Nameless youngsters using the building as a youth club ‘in the meantime’ the time between the original occupation as house of the priest and the new one after restoration. (Source: local inhabitant, 2001)



Figure 7: Nameless youngsters using the parsonage as a youth club 'in the meantime'. (Source: local inhabitant, 2001)



Figure 8: Nameless youngsters using the parsonage as a youth club 'in the meantime'. (Source: local inhabitant, 2001)

## Networks

A valid viewpoint on heritage matters does not always depend on the different meanings of its individual buildings alone but rather on the network of small protected buildings and public spaces, landscapes that might not have much individual value but that in their grouping or agglomeration create a valuable human made (urban) landscape in the past, present and future. At the same time those buildings remain to have, up to today, an impact on the social and cultural stratification and an engaged community involvement is very often present. Dealing with monuments of small scale and local importance historical social, cultural, religious or political networks can be detected once we transcend the solely focus on the object. The reappearance of similar forms and objects indicates a permanent and persistent investigation of the same phenomena, which manifest themselves however each time differently depending on the context. They form invisible networks, complex spaces of experiences of individual and collective memory. This makes them places of attachment and recognition in which the ordinary life can play its play, where it can present itself today and can stay present in the collective memories. “de Solà-Morales, M. (2008)”

Throughout the diversity of these small structures a familiarity can be detected. We perceive images of everyday life – small buildings leading their own slow life. These are structures that were not submitted to rapid change, to fashion or to temporal, fluid and ever shifting ideas. There is nothing heroic or spectacular about these buildings. They are guiltless, rooted completely in the ordinary. All together these buildings and sites form a stimulating part of the multi-layered environment and tools for community building in which natives and newcomers can take part, they belong to the well-known trusted things.

Referring to daily life – enclosed by redundancy – the architect should not focus on the unique but on the recurrent events and buildings that structure our life.

Considering the modest historical buildings as part of a network of public spaces and landscapes, nature can take its righteous place into it as an important extra layer of small or great ecological value.

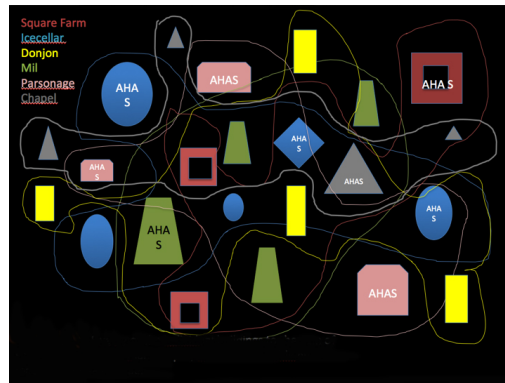


Figure 9: Networks of small local heritage, having acknowledged Architectural, Historical and Archaeological value and added new social value, together they form a stimulating part of the multi-layered environment (source: Gisèle Gantois, 2012)

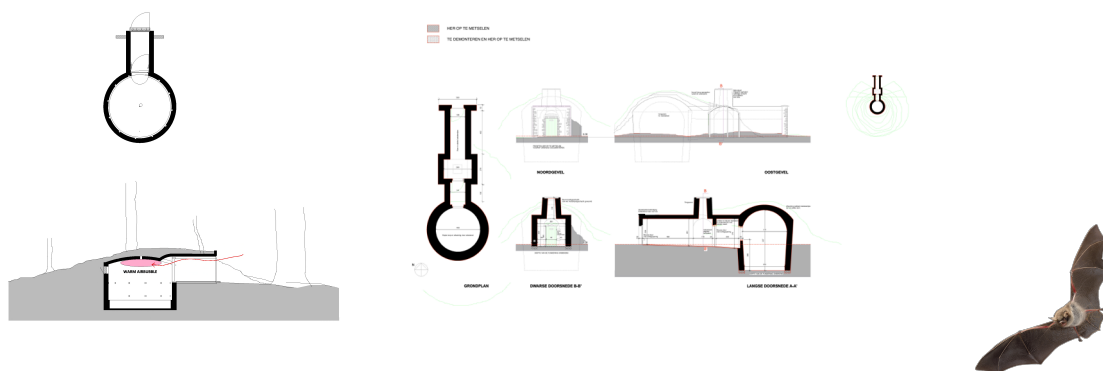


Figure 10 + 10bis: ice cellars, left ice cellar of Linterpoorten (Zemst), right ice cellar of Schiplaken (Zemst).

The old historical network of ice cellars not only provided ice to the owners of the castles, they are often situated in private gardens near castles, but the owners were also obliged to provide ice to the community for medical reasons. Today they are empty and lost their function.

They all have the same intrinsic qualities, stable  $t^{\circ}$ , stable humidity degree, no light, no draught, all oriented to the North. These happen to be the ideal conditions for bats to hibernate. Bats lost most of their natural habitat and became an endangered species. It requires only very small interventions to invite them to install them in the ice cellars. They cause no harm to the building. Like this we could create a new network of great ecological importance. (Source: drawings Gisèle Gantois, 2012, image of Natterer's bat – *Myotis nattereri*,

<http://www.meldpuntvleermuisgenenmarters.nl/index.php?page=Franjestaart>)



Figure 11:

The quantity of still existing parsonages is impressive, all following the same concept and archetypical plan, all protected individually for their AHA values. Interesting is the fact that these parsonages, popping up in every little village formed together invisible historical networks religiously, socially and politically. (Source: pictures of Norbertine parsonages collected on <https://inventaris.onroerenderfgoed.be/>)

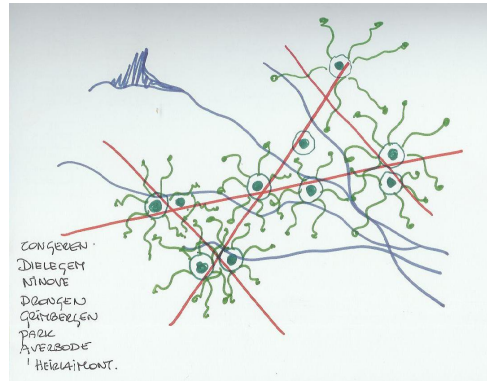


Figure 12: Like an octopus outstretching its tentacles, the abbeys, in this case of the Norbertine order, constructed their UFO-like parsonages thus structuring our landscapes and villages.

Considering these old networks and villages, one could recreate in a different shape with the same buildings new networks of social significance for small communities. (Source: Gisèle Gantois)

## Tools

The key thing however is that the architect is an outsider in the local landscapes and buildings he has to study. One can never discover the world of meaning just by observing a place and doing material survey only. (Collecting information)

The question of empathy then becomes paramount.

The architect as a stranger has to develop the ability to take time to 'listen' to and to observe both 'der Ackermann' and 'der Seemann', which is a respectful but not necessarily subservient attitude, nor is it related with a demagogic tendency of Populism.

According to Frampton "Foster, H. (1983:29)" 'the fundamental strategy (of Critical Regionalism) is to mediate the impact of universal civilization (related to the newcomer) with elements derived *indirectly* from the peculiarities of a particular place (related to the native).'

Understanding the 'in-laying' "Foster, H. (1983:29)" of the building into the site with its peculiarities such as 'local light, or in a tectonic derived from a peculiar structural mode or in the topography of a given site' is important but we would like to add the necessity of a long period of in-dwelling for the architect while observing people on location and collecting their stories. (Collecting meaning)

To become a great 'storyteller' "with the freedom to move up and down the rungs of the own experience as on a ladder..." means, "to be rooted in the people (...)" "Hale, D., (2006:1-18)"

## Time & slowness

Time and slowness are essential features in social significance assessment.

The research on built heritage and sites relies on a range of primary and secondary materials: plans, archives, maps, drawings, paintings, photographs, artistic writings, essays, articles, oral stories and books. But written sources are often hardly to find as the micro, fragile scale of the local heritage only got a poor place into the historiography. The true source of all sources then is the built environment itself. The process of assimilation, which takes place in depth, requires a state of rest. Therefore the period of analysis and registration of the existing takes an important place in the assignment.

The meticulous survey of the AHA values then becomes a tool to gain time in favour of the uncovering of meanings by unveiling different layers and networks and an opportunity to discover the more fragile actual meaning. We are aware of the fact that it is not easy to trace this. The method of 'interview' appears not always adequate in finding out the meaning of the environment for the native or the meaning given by the newcomer. As Christopher Alexander states in the Oregon Experiment: 'When an individual creates his own place, he takes these extra, subtle needs into account as a matter of course, because he can feel them. But when he has to explain these needs to an architect, the only ones which get across are the ones which he can state in words.' "Alexander, C. (1975)"

## Close reading by drawing

The act of watching closely can lead to real closeness. Retracing the existing makes things clearer and feeds the understanding of the meaning of the existing today in its context. The act of drawing is a way of



observing and therefore a way of reflecting. Drawing makes one see things differently. The drawing so becomes a tool for the eye.

But perception is more than just the eyes.

In Critical Regionalism, Frampton seeks 'to complement our normative visual experience by readdressing the tactile range of human perceptions. In so doing, it endeavours to balance the priority accorded to the image and to counter the Western tendency to interpret the environment in exclusively perspectival terms. According to its etymology, perspective means rationalized sight or clear seeing, and as such it presupposes a conscious suppression of the senses of smell, hearing and taste, and a consequent distancing from a more direct experience of the environment. This self-imposed limitation relates to that which Heidegger has called a 'loss of nearness.' In attempting to counter this loss, the tactile opposes itself to the scenographic and the drawing of veils over the surface of reality.' "Foster, H. (1983:29)

One needs the sharp eye to discover the trusted things. Observing the existing by close reading is a result of recurrence.

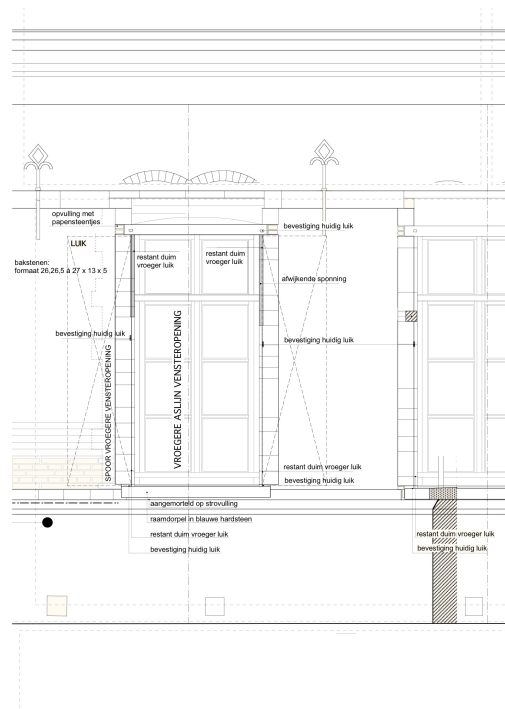


Figure 13: drawing parsonage of Meuzegem, detail of the North West façade. The act of watching closely can lead to real closeness. Retracing the existing makes things clearer and feeds the understanding of the meaning of the existing today in its context. (Source: Gisèle Gantois),

### Cartes Parlantes

Issues as function, structure, scale and program have to be considered in a context of constant change integrating the historical, archaeological, architectural, natural, cultural and social values.

In the physical world, context will have a dimensional and a historical dimension, both of which go to make up the layering of a place with masses and territories with enclosures or boundaries that determine the landscape. If we look over the modern landscape we see a world carved and sliced for so long that it is hard to imagine it even having been otherwise.

By analysing a site we tear apart what belonged together and make abstraction of a lot of information.

On interpenetrating hinged points between the neighbouring horizontal layers we can detect the tangible:

Places, man made landscapes, spaces, tracks, monumental heritage, that which values cathedrals, palaces & monuments, and is of great (universal) importance, but also built heritage of local importance.

Between the vertical slices we discover relations between territories, the intangible: Language, tradition, memory, identification, meaning.

All layers and slices interfering with each other form invisible three-dimensional networks that contribute to the physical and mental identity of our cultural landscapes. They are determined by a permanent

evolution of use and reuse. Every new event or interference intervenes in a specific historical situation. Society is conceived as an organic and integrated whole. Landscapes grow in an organic continuous or discontinuous way. They might be viewed under the aspects of economy, or family, or religion, or politics but all these interpenetrate one another and constitute a single reality.

Subdivision fades into the background of human experience because it is omnipresent: just like a building, the parcel is a receptacle for people and events, endlessly moved, exchanged, replaced, forgotten.

The initial image of layering and slicing appears too limiting here therefore we are searching for new ways of 'mapping', trying to trace, to unveil the intangible.

We can refer to the Middle Ages where instead of maps, they used what the modern Historian François de Dainville called 'cartes parlantes'. These 'terriers' listed hundreds, or even thousands of individual plots of land in a set of fields, giving the exact location of each. "Oles B., (2008)"

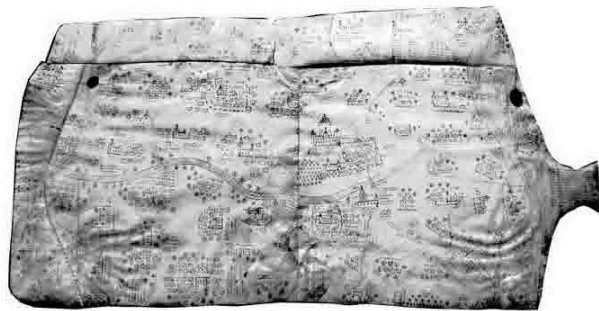
They were judged according not to the adherence to coordinates or scale, but rather according to the faithfulness with which they described relationships between people – usually landowners – and their physical environment. "Sack R., (1986, 100:62)

A map could be conceived not to represent either manor in its entirety, but rather to document the point of their meeting and source of most likely conflict.

From the 16<sup>th</sup> century on simplification in the structure of the boundary was translated into rationalization in the larger landscape. Instead of following the natural curves of the landscape shifts in direction became often abrupt, and right angle bends common for ease of survey layout.

The physical and social patterns of a peopled landscape changed and our reading of the landscape became object focussed, determined by the geometry of construction with long uniform walls, hedges, and roads..

Readapting the concept of the Cartes Parlantes could bring us to a different way of observing, recording relationships between people and territories next to the more acknowledged information as measurements, quantities or proportions.



III. 1. — La vue figurée de la baronnie de Sévérac-le-Château  
(AD Aveyron, E 3013)

Figure 14: This 'Carte Parlante' shows relationships between people rather than coordinates or scale. Source: Dumasy Juliette, *Entre carte, image et pièce juridique : la vue figurée de la baronnie de Sévérac-le-Château (1504)*, PhD, Université de Paris I – Panthéon-Sorbonne, 2008



Figure 15: Site Amelgem, gives a more 3D view of the site. The characteristics are still noticeable today. Source: Abbey of Grimbergen, *Het 1<sup>ste</sup> Caertbladt der Abdyje Goederen ghetrocken uijt de Figurative Caerte van Brußegem als mede volgende*. 1705.

## Conclusion

Understanding the endless interactions of people with their environment, hidden networks and the attachment of people to their environment together with the land-shaping factors of our cultivated landscapes and structures can help us in developing better and more nuanced restoration projects.

Briefly, the heritage practitioner has to learn to know the built environment better in its social and cultural, natural or landscaping context and from there, to start to write its narrative.

This could prevent him to be tempted to try to revive the hypothetical forms of a lost vernacular with a purification of its meaning to its initial one, or to remove the history of the building since its inception neglecting valuable adaptations of the (former) occupants, the use of it in the meantime and the new significances attributed to the structure both by natives and newcomers.

We don't want to question the Architectural and Artistic, Historical and Archaeological values acknowledged and framed the moment of protection of the building but we would like to consider new added actual social and cultural values given by the social construct in order to contribute to social cohesion and to the preservation of the built environment.

Restoration projects cannot be removed from human affairs or they will be uninhabitable and as a result socially not accepted.

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Monument, Oxford Dictionaries: 1. *A statue, building, or other structure erected to commemorate a notable person or event.* Other meanings are 1.1. *A statue or other structure placed over a grave in memory of the dead* or 1.2. *A building, structure, or site that is of historical importance or interest* or 1.3. *An enduring and memorable example of something*

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